

### ONLINE COLLECTION IN THE LABOUR FORCE SURVEY

#### INTRODUCTION

Households selected in the ABS's Labour Force Survey (LFS) have traditionally responded through a telephone or face-to-face interview. Since April 2014, all households in the survey have been provided the option of responding through online collection. This article provides the annual update on the online collection take up rates by LFS respondents.

#### CURRENT COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Households selected in the LFS are sent a letter and brochure informing them that they have been selected to participate in the survey, and that they have the option of responding online. Survey respondents can then create their own account and password to complete the survey online within a specified one week period.

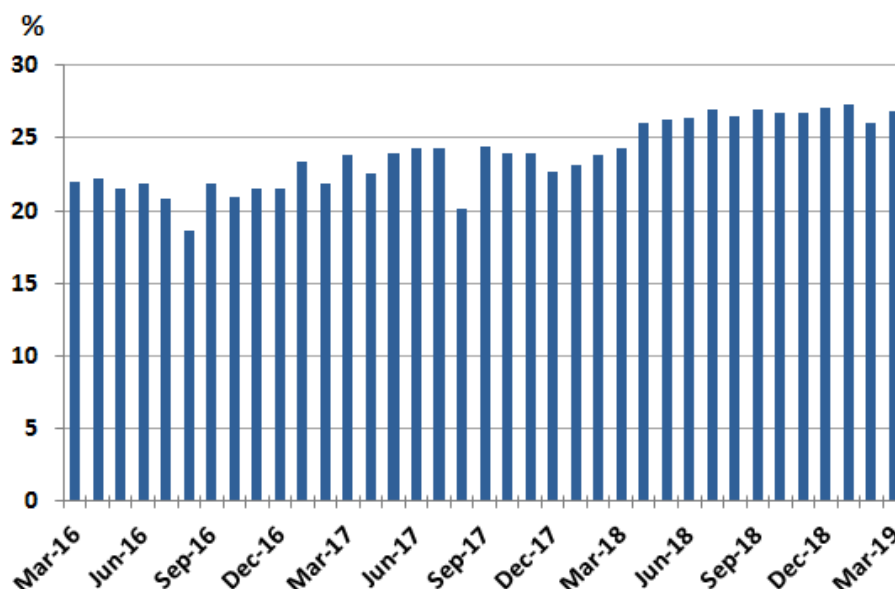
Respondents who are unable or do not wish to participate in the survey online are asked to contact the ABS. They are subsequently contacted by an ABS interviewer to complete the survey questionnaire either via telephone or face-to-face. Households who register contact details for the household electronically, but do not complete the survey questionnaire online within the specified one week period, are also contacted by an ABS interviewer to collect a response via telephone or face-to-face.

#### ONLINE COLLECTION TAKE UP

Online collection take up rates have generally increased since March 2016 (as can be seen in Graph 1). The highest take up rate during the period was 27.4% in January 2019 and the lowest take up rate was 18.7% in August 2016.

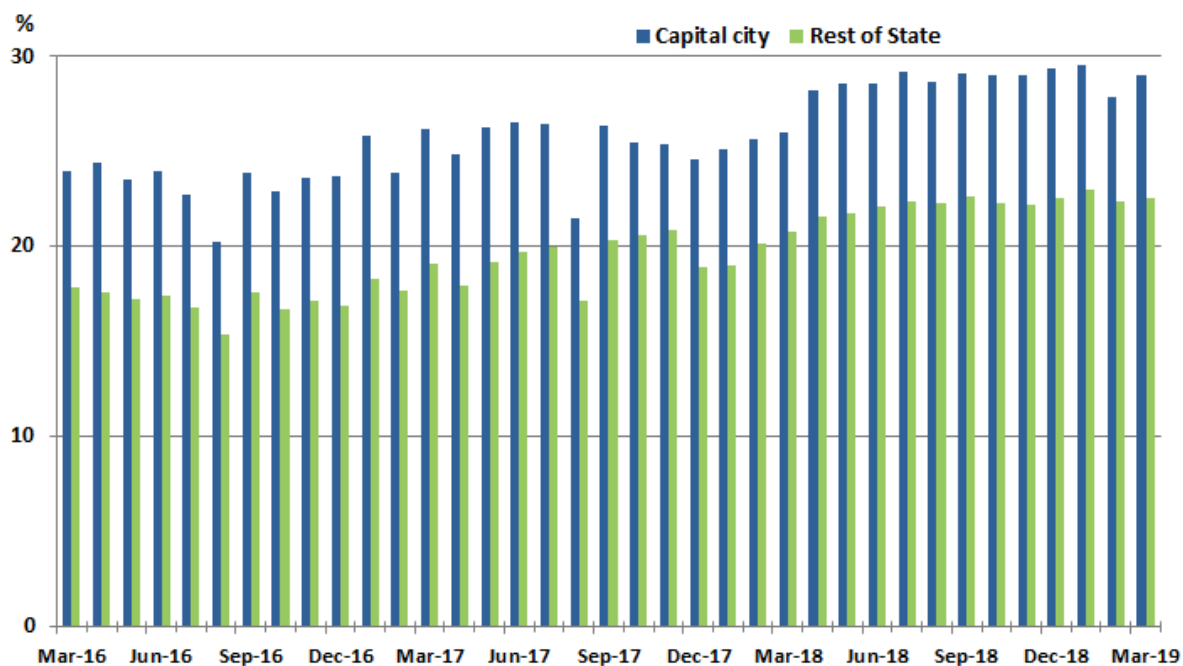
The months where online collection take up rates declined, relative to the previous month, tended to be months where supplementary surveys were also collected (*Participation, Job Search and Mobility* in February, and *Characteristics of Employment* in August), or months which contain public holidays (Christmas and Easter).

**Graph 1 - Monthly Online Collection Take Up Rate**



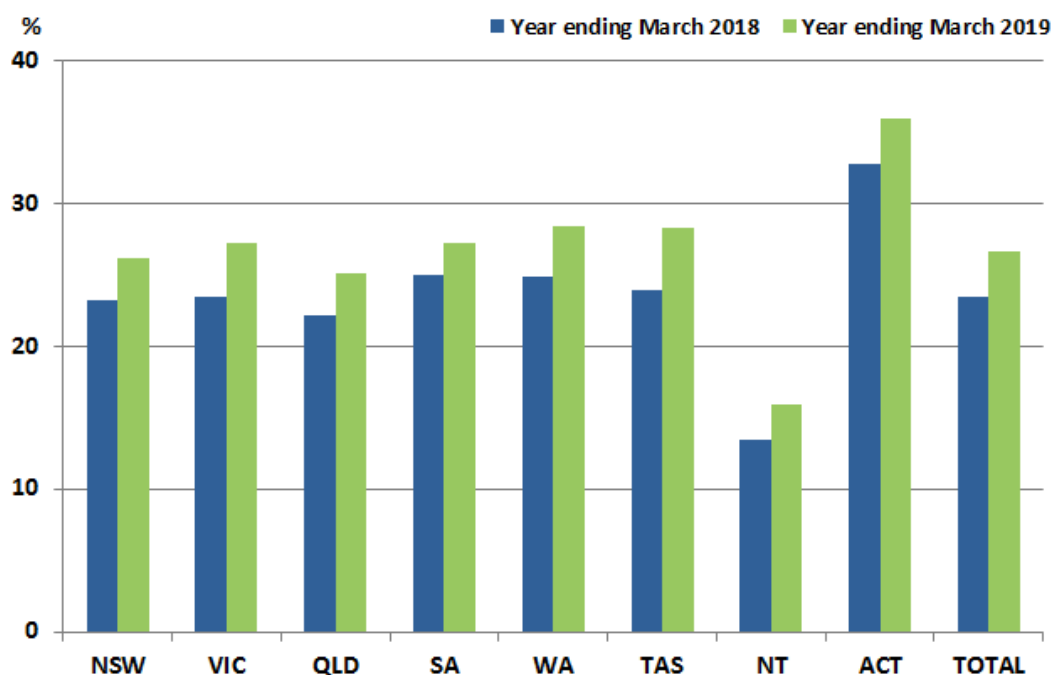
Graph 2 shows that respondents living in capital cities continue to show a stronger preference for online response compared to respondents living in the rest of the state regions.

**Graph 2 - Online Collection Take Up Rates, by Capital City/ Rest of State**



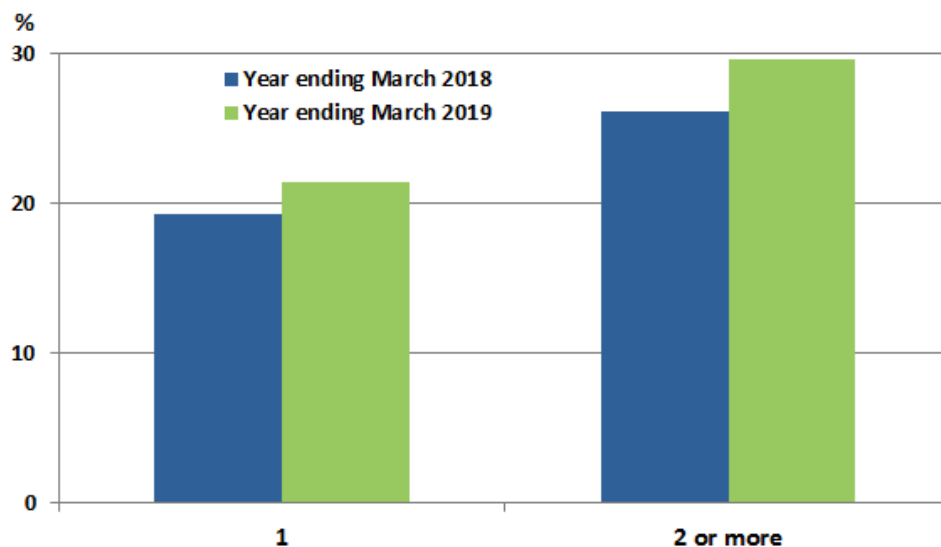
Graph 3 shows there was a higher take up of online collection in some states and territories than in others. Graph 3 also shows that all states and territories had a higher online collection take up rate in the year ending March 2019 compared to a year earlier. In the year ending March 2019, average online collection take up rates across all states and territories increased from 23.5 per cent to 26.7 per cent (up 3.2 pts). The Australian Capital Territory was the highest at 35.9 per cent, and the Northern Territory the lowest at 15.9 per cent. The biggest increase was in Tasmania (up 4.4 pts to 28.3 per cent), and the smallest in South Australia (up 2.2 pts to 27.2 per cent).

**Graph 3 - Average Online Collection Take Up Rates, by State and Territory**



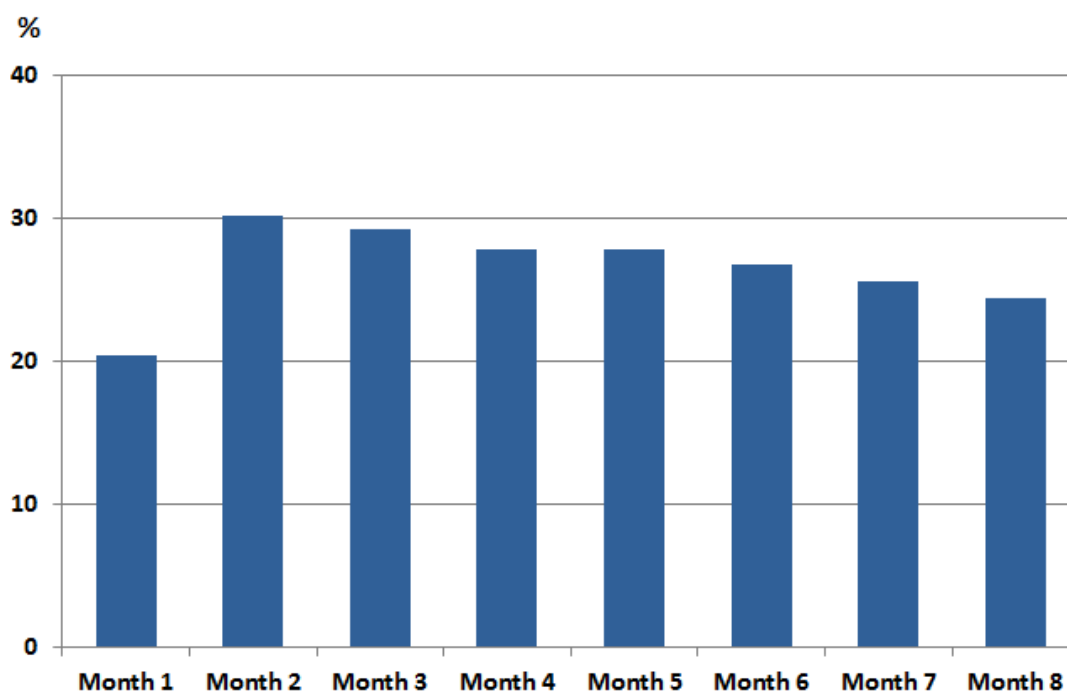
Households with two or more people appear to have a stronger preference for online collection, compared to single person households. Online collection rates by household size have increased over the past two years for both (as can be seen in Graph 4).

**Graph 4 - Household Size and Average Online Collection Rate**



Between April 2018 and March 2019, online collection take up was highest for respondents in their second month in the survey. This is attributed to interviewers discussing the option of answering the LFS survey online in future months with telephone and face-to-face respondents in their first month in the survey, when they are in the incoming rotation group. Online collection rates generally reduced over the following months (as can be seen in Graph 5). This pattern was seen across groups who completed their 8 months in the survey in the year to March 2019.

**Graph 5 – Average Online Collection Rates by Time in Survey**



Analysis of the characteristics of respondents who chose to respond through online collection continued to show that these respondents were more likely to:

- Be female;
- Be employed (higher employment to population ratio);
- Have a higher participation rate; and
- Work in higher skilled occupations (especially professionals).

## **Appendix: Timeline of Online Collection Changes**

**December 2012 to April 2013:** the ABS conducted a trial of online data collection. During this time, households in a single rotation group (i.e. one-eighth of the survey sample) were offered the option of self-completing their LFS questionnaire online instead of a telephone or face-to-face interview.

**May 2013:** the ABS expanded the offer of online collection to 50% of each incoming rotation group.

**September 2013:** online collection offered to all households in each incoming rotation group.

**April 2014:** all households offered the option of online collection. Interviewer collection modes (both telephone and face-to-face) continue to be available for households.

**July 2015:** the ABS implemented a major update to the online collection portal and additional improvements to the security of respondents' accounts. Respondents now create their own account and password, enabling improved self-management of account details and improved security.

**April 2018:** the ABS updated its approach to contacting respondents, including improved letters and instructions on how to access and complete the survey online. This followed a period of testing changes with a sample of respondents.

**December 2018:** the ABS updated the timing of when letters are sent to the incoming rotation group, and added a second reminder, to support further take-up of online completion of the survey. This followed a period of testing changes with a sample of respondents.

## **NEXT UPDATE**

The next LFS online collection update will be released with the April 2020 issue, in May 2020.

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